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TAGS: PREL PHUM KCFE LO MEPP

SUBJECT: TOUR D'HORIZON WITH NEW SLOVAK POLITICAL DIRECTOR
BUZEK

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a cordial luncheon on September 5, DCM and new Slovak Political Director Roman Buzek exchanged views on Kosovo, the Middle East, CFE, and Slovakia's candidacy for the Human Rights Council. Buzek repeated well-known Slovak red lines on Kosovo, but confirmed that Slovakia would not, in the event of a failure to achieve a UNSCR, block an ESDP Mission to Kosovo. On CFE, Buzek pledged to provide the Embassy information regarding the Slovak ratification process within a few days. He stressed GOS insistence on full Russian implementation of the Istanbul commitments before depositing the instruments of ratification. Buzek raised the issue of discussion within the EU to restart communication with Hamas, which the DCM countered would be a serious mistake. Finally, Buzek commented on the challenge of promoting higher levels of foreign aid in the current political climate, and close to home, of maintaining Foreign Ministry staffing levels in the face of budget cuts. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Kosovo: While Slovakia would much prefer a UNSCR on Kosovo, Buzek (who studied and served in Moscow) sees no chance that the Russians will change their stance. In that case, Slovakia cannot recognize an independent Kosovo, nor could it participate in or even endorse an ESDP Mission there. Slovak politicians would not countenance Slovak participation, and Slovak troops, according to Buzek, would not be welcome in Kosovo, in any case. That said, Slovakia would not stand in the way of an ESDP Mission, UNSCR sanctioned or not. Buzek briefed on the visit to Bratislava of Troika Member Wolfgang Ischinger. In meetings with FM Kubis and MFA State Secretary Strofova on August 31, Ischinger stressed the need for EU unity and to prepare for next steps in case there is no UNSCR.

3.(C) Human Rights Council: Buzek shared Slovak pique that the Czechs had recently declared their candidacy for a seat on the Human Rights Council (HRC) after the Slovaks had announced their intentions several months ago. According to Buzek, the Czechs are arguing that as holder of the EU Presidency in 2009, it should also have a seat on the HRC. Pointing out that the EU term was only for six months, while the HRC position lasts three years, Buzek expressed frustration that the Slovaks had not been able to convince their erstwhile countrymen to stand down, noting that, on occasion Slovaks and Czechs revert to their "competitive ways." Buzek fears that the competition between the two could result in the election of the other two competitors, Serbia and Ukraine. Buzek also commented that the Croatians are giving the Czechs a run for their money as a candidate for the UNSC seat the Slovaks are vacating. He was not at

all certain the Czechs would prevail.

4.(C) CFE: Buzek reiterated FM Kubis's earlier call for a concrete, reciprocal plan to address the ongoing stalemate with Russia on CFE. DCM underscored that the U.S. plan met those criteria: it is reciprocal through the process, with scheduled benchmarks. Buzek expressed appreciation for our plan and said that Slovakia would insist on full Russian implementation of Istanbul commitments before being able to deposit the articles of ratification; DCM confirmed that this was precisely the U.S. plan.

15. (C) Middle East: Buzek raised (somewhat apologetically) the issue of pressure within the EU to restart communication with Hamas. DCM countered strongly that this would be a serious mistake. Hamas was not willing to show any flexibility on the issue of dealing with Israel, and President Abbas and PM Fayyad need international support now more than ever. Restarting talks with a violent, uncompromising Hamas would only damage prospects for progress between the Israelis and Palestinians. Buzek said he understood and agreed with our stance.

16. (C) Slovak Foreign Aid: Buzek bemoaned the low level of funding for SlovakAid and expressed doubt that it would rise anytime soon. MFA officials had hoped that sharp EU criticism of the low ratio of aid to GDP would sway the government. However, neither the government nor the public appear to feel an obligation to allocate money for projects overseas. Slovaks still think of themselves as aid recipients, not donors. According to the government's budget plan, funding for SlovakAid is slated to rise to 400 million SK (approximately 16.2 million USD) in a few years (it is now 166 million, or approximately 6.7 million USD), but Buzek said he would be quite surprised if that were the case. Buzek reacted positively to the Embassy's willingness to

complement the GOS's projects with our small grants in promotion of transformational diplomacy.

17. (C) MFA Staff Cuts: MFA has cut 81 positions in response to Prime Minister Fico's call for a 20 percent across-the-board reduction in personnel in all ministries. The MFA reductions don't approach twenty percent (a full 20 percent would be about 230 positions), but it has cut a higher percentage than any other ministry. Buzek says the MFA hopes this will shield it from further pressure from Fico. None of the eliminated positions are in embassies, and approximately 50 are positions that have not been filled for years.

18. (C) Bio Note: Buzek is a forthcoming and collegial interlocutor, though lacking the dynamism of his predecessor, Miro Lajcak. He was always extremely cooperative as Director of IO affairs, including the UNSC.

VALLEE